

Information on Soteria – Vermont

In early 2012, the Vermont legislature passed Act 79 to enhance community mental health services. Among other initiatives, this legislation calls for the creation of:

...a voluntary five-bed residence for individuals seeking to avoid or reduce reliance on medication or having an initial episode of psychosis. The residence shall be peer supported and noncoercive, and treatment shall be focused on a nontraditional, interpersonal, and psychosocial approach, with minimal use of psychotropic medications to facilitate recovery in individuals seeking an alternative to traditional hospitalization.

Pathways Vermont was recently awarded a contract to develop this residence in the greater Burlington area utilizing principles from Soteria, a successful program from the 1970s that was started with a National Institute of Mental Health grant. The Soteria model differs from traditional hospitalization in its focus on “being with” instead of “doing to” individuals, its tolerance and flexibility to adapt to one’s process, its cautious use of neuroleptic medications, its creative and non-professionalized environment, and most importantly, its belief that psychosis can be a temporary experience that one can work through as opposed to a chronic mental illness that needs to be managed.

The original Soteria project lasted for eleven years and was rigorously studied. Compared with controls at a traditional hospital, residents fared as well or better on every measure. In effect, it proved that interpersonal and psychosocial approaches alone can facilitate recovery for many persons on course to being diagnosed with schizophrenia.

Ideally, Soteria-VT will work with people having a first or second psychotic break who have not had substantial exposure to neuroleptic medication. Its primary service will be interpersonal relationship-building in a safe, flexible, empowering, and homelike environment. Additionally, Soteria-VT will offer trauma-informed peer supports, Naturopathic consultation, voluntary medication in selective instances, techniques for stress reduction, access to creative tools, skill development, gardening, healthy food, and the ability for folks to continue social roles. Based on data available, stays at Soteria-VT are expected to average three to four months.

Soteria-VT is targeted to open in mid to late 2013.

For more information, please contact:

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